

# Unitarian Universalist United Nations Office

[www.uu-uno.org](http://www.uu-uno.org)

*Empowering UUs to participate in the UN's work to build a just international community*

The Unitarian Universalist United Nations Office (UU-UNO) connects UU congregations throughout the world with the vital work of the United Nations. Increasingly, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) such as the UU-UNO provide a network that enables us to engage UUs from various countries on timely issues, and to encourage UUs—as individuals and as congregations—to put UU principles into practice through the local-global connections. This past year has been a momentous period for the UN and the UU-UNO, particularly as we have connected with more congregations, and broadened gateways to access information and analysis on UN reform and MDGs.

## **Mission and Major Goals clarified through 2005-2008 Strategic Plan process**

The Board of the UU-UNO adopted the following Mission Statement, as part of its Strategic Planning Process. “The UU-UNO promotes the goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all, as reflected in the United Nations Charter. Through targeted education, advocacy and outreach, we engage Unitarian Universalists in support of international cooperation and the work of the UN.”

Major goals are to promote sustainable development as a means to achieve peace, security and human rights. And to encourage reform of the UN that enhances the effectiveness of the organization.

The 2005-2008 Strategic Plan adopted by the Board at its September meeting created process for setting program priorities, outlined measures for building professional capacity of the office, and set goals for proactive fundraising.

## **D.A.N.C.E.—**

### **Demystifying the UN, Advocating, Networking, Congregation involvement, Engaging UUs**

UU-UNO Envoys and other members advocate at the UN through Statements of Conscience, and those of us in the UN neighborhood advocate through joint meetings with other NGOs as well as hallway encounters with staff from Permanent Missions and UN departments. Thanks to our location at the Church Center for the UN, we are able to magnify our effect by networking with NGO Committees. The outreach among UUs, NGOs and UN offices and UN Member States, in short, is like facilitating a D.A.N.C.E.:

- Demystifying the UN, in quest to return to the idealism of the UN Charter ;
- Advocating for UU voices at the UN, and linking UN and UU experiences;
- Networking among NGOs, working among religious-based and thematic coalitions;
- Congregation involvement, valuing the local initiatives which shape world community;
- Engaging UUs, respecting traditions of open minds, open hearts and open hands.

The [www.uu-uno.org](http://www.uu-uno.org) website serves as a vital resource to become involved with our work, and to use as a gateway for information about various UN themes and civil society engagement. In addition to the website, the UU-UNO seeks to demystify the UN through newsletter articles, speaking opportunities, Intergenerational Spring Seminar, internships and visits to the UN. Numerous congregations visited for a Department of Public Information NGO briefing, or a customized discussion in the Office. We welcome this, to enrich attention to UN arenas year-round.

Secretary General Kofi Annan's report “*In Larger Freedom: Towards Human Security, Human Rights and Development for All*,” issued in March 2005 was to guide nation-states' and Civil Society preparations for the Fall 2005 World Summit of Heads of State and Leaders. The “year of opportunity” generated mixed results. In spite of contentious maneuvers by certain Member States, the UN succeeded to:

- form a new Peacebuilding Commission to reduce recidivism of conflicts and increase human security,
- establish a Human Rights Council to succeed the Human Rights Commission, preserving the role of NGOs
- adopt the concept “Responsibility to Protect” for all nations to safeguard citizens against atrocities
- establish a Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to better coordinate emergency humanitarian assistance
- institute whistle-blowing mechanisms for staff and implement systemic managerial reforms,
- pass a Convention Against Corruption for states, and
- make progress towards a Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Other discussions were not resolved through the UN 60<sup>th</sup> General Assembly Committees that followed-up the 2005 World Summit *Outcome Document*. Reform of the Security Council, and aspects of the Economic and Social Council and review of its development paradigm remain unfinished business. Also uncertain is the major undertaking of physically updating the UN Headquarters.

The “year of opportunity” also yielded a mixed report card on progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), to be achieved by 2015. For some geographic areas, aggregate country reports on indicators for education, health and sustainable environment are encouraging. Yet other countries are not only behind targets for this stage, but disparities of conditions have widened. The brightest beacons of hope continue to come from *collaborative efforts* of community-based indigenous organizations, nation-states, international partners and UN agencies.

### **“Every Child is Our Child,” “Cradle Club” programs build upon a living legacy of advocacy, education, putting ideas-into-action**

One stellar example of these partnerships is the program sponsored by the UU-UNO, *Every Child is Our Child Program*. This program engages UUs with the MDGs, particularly goals for eradicating extreme poverty, promoting universal primary education, reducing risk of HIV-AIDS and the stigma too often associated with children orphaned by AIDS, and promoting partnerships for development. The seeds for the program were cultivated through discussions with appropriate UN agencies, UU contacts, and most importantly the partnership with the Queen Mothers Association. These traditional caregivers for youth in Eastern Ghana have taught the UU-UNO about their community needs, their responsibilities, and the cultural context.

During the first year of the *Every Child is Our Child Program*, contributors have provided for the school fees for 40 students orphaned by AIDS, and the cost of enrolling these students and the care-giving families in the new Ghanaian health insurance plan. Donors have also contributed funds to sustain support for these youth through Junior Secondary Education, and funds to support additional youth. The UU-UNO has shared the story, and has been blessed by stories of congregations that are integrating this program into their social justice life.

Congregations have also responded to the *Cradle Club Program* invitation to partner with the Southwest Indian Relief Council, to participate in prenatal classes in exchange for “Healthy Baby Kits,” which contain supplies for infants and educational pamphlets for young mothers. This support highlights the relevance of MDGs to North American context, and also the importance of human rights in the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

These are but two examples of how the members of the UU-UNO contribute concretely to the achievement of the MDGs measurable objectives, and to the *Voices Against Poverty* campaign momentum to hold governments accountable to promises made to implement and monitor the Millennium Campaign.

### **UU-UNO programs in the context of partnerships for development and peacebuilding**

The underlying goal of these programs is the quest to ensure dignity and “make poverty history.” “We the Peoples”—the civil society reflected in the Preamble to the UN Charter—created the political will for the *One Campaign*, for restructuring debt forgiveness among the poorest countries, and cracking open the institutional process of Financing for Development (World Bank, IMF, regional development banks). The UU-UNO participated in the shared voice of the Ecumenical Working Group and the NGO Committee on Financing for Development.

Congregations are also engaged in promoting dignity-of-all through exploring partnerships for microfinance, exploring ways to replicate best practices shared during the 2005 UN Year of Microfinance. The UU-UNO is partnering with other UU groups to share background resources, toolkits and case studies.

Another major initiative has been our partnership with Darfur Coalition members. Office staff and interns have attended UN Security Council briefings and community teach-ins and provided updates on our website, and have joined UUs at congregation discussions, vigils at the U.S. Mission to the UN, and the historic April 30 rally in Washington. The awareness around Darfur, including Darfur Sunday, the 2005 *Action of Immediate Witness*, and the visit in November of President Bill Sinkford, photographer Danielle Sinkford and UUSC President Charlie Clements to Darfurian refugees in Chad, paves the way for sustained attention to building comprehensive peace in the region, and monitoring warning signs for humanitarian crises. The May 5 Peace Agreement is but one milestone for an arduous, peacebuilding challenge.

The response to the atrocities in Darfur have been frustratingly slow, compounded by politics of Security Council Member States and the parties to the peace negotiations. Yet in the larger historic moment, the Darfur Coalition bore witness to the resolve to “never forget” and therefore hastened the pace or gestation period of awareness-building and creating coalitions to sustain commitments. “We the Peoples” marked the urgency, galvanized political will, and committed resources to monitoring progress.

### **Global citizens raise questions, perspectives—“listening loudly” as a learning community**

The UN is an invaluable forum, sometimes leading to Programs of Action. Sometimes it seems that Member States are “listening loudly,” and sometimes it seems they are just being “loud”...without the listening. Likewise, youth group and congregation discussions on social justice engage UUs on issues. Insights from one topic can help raise attention to the underlying causes of many less-reported humanitarian crises and violations of human rights, or the success stories of UN involvement. The UU-UNO encourages congregations to share summaries and insights that might benefit discussions among NGOs and other UN actors.

UU presence at the UN enables sharing congregation insights at roundtable and corridor discussions, particularly during major meetings of the UN Economic and Social Council, such as the Commission on Social Development, Commission on the Status of Women, Commission on Sustainable Development, and Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Additionally, input through NGO Committees leverage our voices, and listening power. We seek to draw UUs with passions and/or expertise related to UN issues, to become more proactive in these dialogues.

Over the years, interns, Envoys, Advisors and other members have researched a variety of issues and themes, and much of this is shared on the UU-UNO website [www.uu-uno.org](http://www.uu-uno.org). The website was overhauled in December. Among the improved features are advocacy tools, a calendar of UN and NGO events, and a youth page, with education links for students and teachers. More information is being added each month, building a working archive.

The UU-UNO also co-sponsors or enables groups to convene public discussions at the Church Center. We partner with various levels of the World Federation of UN Associations and the UNA-USA Council of Organizations. We have worked directly with the UNA-NY Chapter, UNA-NJ Division, and UNA-Westchester Chapter, and several congregations work with or host local UNA chapters. We also co-sponsored a public forum on the October 2005 U.S. Report to the Human Rights Commission, including challenges to U.S. human rights violations.

### **Reclaiming the impact of involvement with the UU-UNO, building relations**

Website resources combined with face-to-face contact underscore how a small office with complex connections can magnify its impact. The UU-UNO values knowing about the impact fostered by participation in UU-UNO related events and responsibilities. We are in the midst of reconnecting with past interns, Board members, long-time Envoys and other friends, asking how their involvement informed their journey in Unitarian Universalism. Reclaiming this biographical history is part of our process to explore prospects for our future. As we look at archival copies of the *Window on the World*, we remember the scope of issues addressed and the breadth of congregation involvement. We seek to rekindle these relationships.

Another way these relationships are sustained is through UN Sunday observances. During 2005-2006, more congregations participated in UN Sunday, and more congregations hosted a UU-UNO intern, staff member, Board member or member of the Council of Advisors than in recent years. We were particularly grateful to the First UU Society of San Francisco for hosting the January Board meeting, in the shadows of where the UN was founded. Moreover, various congregations have shared models of their UN/Global Affairs committee, and practices of collaborating with local UNA chapters and other civil society groups with affiliation with the UN Department of Public Information and/or the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

One of the strongest linkages with congregations is through the Annual Intergenerational Spring Seminar. This April more than 130 youth, young adults and adults created personal action plans at the end of three days of discussion on “*People, Poverty, Power.*” Planning for this was intergenerational, and geographic representation was continental. The intergenerational leadership was an intense expression of the year-round mentorship embodied in the Internship Program. Indeed, the weekly encounters enrich the life of the UU-UNO and brings meaning of UN challenges home to small and large communities. PLEASE JOIN US IN THIS COMMON QUEST.

*Jim L. Nelson, Executive Director*